BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT
Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies | African and Afro-American Studies 136A
Brandeis University
Spring 2015
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5-6:20
G03 Mandel Center for the Humanities

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Office hours: Wednesday 10-12, by appointment

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Course Description

In 1892, Anna Julia Cooper wrote that, “Only the black woman can say ‘when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing, or special patronage, then and there the whole...race enters with me.’” In its commitment to applying black feminism to examine notions of belonging, justice, and freedom, this course follows Cooper’s lead.

Beginning with the institution of slavery and carrying on to the present day, we will examine the field of Black Feminist Thought—or, the political, social, and economic forces that shape Black American women’s lives. We will ask: How do black women’s lives, labor, and social location lay bare the limits of maleness and whiteness as dominant frames? Why and how do black women matter to us all? Together, we’ll ride the three waves of black feminism to explore the ways black women have been consequential to notions of citizenship, liberation, and culture.

Learning Goals and Objectives

Through this course, students will:

- Understand the centrality of black women to race and sex/gender movements and debates.
- Engage the works of key figures in the field of Black Feminist Thought.
- Become familiar with the long history of black feminism, its historical significance and its current applications.
- Be able to apply theories of intersectionality to political, social, and economic arenas.
- Hone their critical reading and written communication skills.

This is your course, and its success depends on your engaged participation. Students are expected to be fully prepared for every class, to have completed the assigned reading and to be ready to pose questions, try out ideas, listen to and challenge the ideas of others, and actively engage the material as a group. Please come ready to discuss the day’s reading in depth. This means reading not only for content, but also for overarching themes that emerge—for context and form, and for the silences and absences present.

Course Components

- Attendance and Participation 20% | Attendance, promptness, and active presence is mandatory. Absences must be communicated at least one week in advance and accompany documentation to be excused. **More than two unexcused absences will result in a zero for your attendance grade. Three tardies = one absence.**
- Words with Friends 5% (Due 12p on the day of class)
- Midterm 25% (March 3)
- Analytical Paper 25% (April 28)
- Final exam 25% (Tuesday May 5, 6pm)

Deadlines and exam dates are non-negotiable. All written assignments must be Times New Roman 12, double-spaced with one-inch margins and adhere to Chicago or MLA citation format. Please allow 48 hours for a response to email inquiries. Assignments are due at the beginning of class and will be deducted by 1/3 of a letter grade for each day late.
While computers/tablets may be used to reference readings, this is an off-line zone. Phones should be silenced and left undisturbed for the duration of the class.

**Required Texts**

Books
Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (all but chapters 9-11)
Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*
Joy James and T Denean Sharpley-Whiting eds., *The Black Feminist Reader*
Janet Mock, *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More*
Toni Morrison, *Sula*
Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric*
All additional readings are posted on Latte.

Films
Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust*
Laverne Cox, *Laverne Cox Presents: The T Word*
Pratibha Parmar, *Alice Walker: Beauty in Truth*
Freida Mock, *Anita*
Ed Burke, Beyoncé, Ilan Y. Benatar, *Beyoncé: Life is But a Dream*

**Academic Integrity**

You are expected to be familiar with, and to follow, the University's policies on academic integrity. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures. All policies related to academic integrity apply to in-class and take home projects, assignments, exams, and quizzes. Students may only collaborate on assignments with permission from the instructor. Allegations of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Students may not turn in work submitted for another class. Doing so will yield an “F” for your final grade.

**Accommodations**

If you are a student who needs academic accommodations because of a documented disability on record at Brandeis University, please present your letter of accommodation immediately. Letters of accommodation must be presented at the start of the semester to ensure the provision of accommodations. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

**Course Outline**

**UNIT ONE: FOUNDATIONS**

Jan 13  **Introductions**


Jan 20  **What** | Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex” (BFR); bell hooks, “Black Women Shaping Feminist Theory” (BFR)


**UNIT TWO: FIRST WAVE**

Jan 27  **Enslavement** | Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* Chapters I-XXII; Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* Chapters 1; Sojourner Truth, "Ain’t I a Woman?"

Jan 29  **Abolition** | Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* Chapters XXIII-XLI; Frederick Douglass, “Why I Became a Woman’s Rights Man” in *Frederick Douglass on Women’s Rights*; Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* Chapter 2

*Feb 4 - Faith Smith, WGS Distinguished Faculty Lecture "Strolling in the Ruins" 3:30pm Alumni Lounge*

Feb 5  ** Discussion Sections | Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* Chapters 6-7

### UNIT THREE: SECOND WAVE

Feb 10  ** Organizing | Mary Church Terrell, “What it Means to be Colored”; Ida B Wells, “The Case Stated” in *The Red Record*; Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* Chapter 8


Feb 26  ** Jenni Jones Talk | Toni Morrison, *Sula* Part II; “You Make Me Feel Like 100 Billie Holiday Songs: A Conversation with Jennie C. Jones”; Jones - Oakzine; Jones - YBCA Interview

Mar 3  ** Midterm

### UNIT FOUR: THIRD WAVE

Mar 5  ** Discussion Section - Breaks | Rebecca Walker, "Becoming the Third Wave"; Maya Angelou, “On the Pulse of the Morning”; Combahee River Collective Statement (BFR); Michael Awkward, “A Black Man’s Place in Black Feminist Criticism” (BFR)


*March 10 - "Criminal Justice? Race, Gender and Incarceration" Lubin Symposium 3:30pm*

Mar 12  ** Queer, Quare | E. Patrick Johnson, “’Quare’ Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother” in *Black Queer Studies*; Cathy Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” in *Black Queer Studies*

Mar 17  ** Institutionalization | Joy James “Radicalizing Feminism” (BFR); Barbara Christian, “A Race for Theory” (BFR); Ann duCille, “The Occult of True Black Womanhood” in *Signs*; Pratibha Parmar, *Alice Walker: Beauty in Truth*

Mar 19  ** Discussion Sections | Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Whose Story is it Anyway? Feminist and Antiracist Appropriations of Anita Hill” in *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power*; “African American Women in Defense of Ourselves” (BFR); Freida Mock, *Anita*

### UNIT 5: TODAY


Mar 31  ** Quotidian Violence | Claudia Rankin, *Citizen: An American Lyric* Pgs 1-97
Apr 2   Discussion Sections | Claudia Rankin, *Citizen: An American Lyric* Pgs 98-162

4/7 + 9  No class (Passover and Spring Recess)

*Apr 11 - Third Exposure: Race and Visual Culture Symposium*

UNIT 6: TOMORROWS


Apr 16  Transfeminism | Janet Mock, *Redefining Realness* Part II; Mia Mingus, “Moving Toward the Ugly: A Politic Beyond Desirability” in *Leaving Evidence*; *Lavern Cox Presents: The T Word*

Apr 21  Public Feminism + Guest Lecture with Dr. Brittney Cooper | Janet Mock, *Redefining Realness* Part III; “Beyoncé: Life is But a Dream” (HBO); Brittney Cooper, “On bell, Beyoncé, and Bullsh*it” on *Crunk Feminist Collective*; “Watch bell hooks and Janet Mock Talk About Liberating the Black Female Body” (Recommended)

Apr 23  Black Feminist Futures

Apr 28  No class (Brandeis Friday) | Analytical Paper Due

May 5   Final exam (6-9)
Analytical Paper

Throughout this course, we've examined the historical legacy of black feminist theory and practice. Analytical papers require you to apply a black feminist analytic to a topic of your choosing. Your final work may take the form of an extended reading, or critical analysis of a cultural object produced by a black woman (one not already considered during the course of the semester); a review essay of a scholarly text in the field; an engagement with a theoretical issue; or on a topic of your own choosing.

You will submit:

1) a 3,000-word formal paper on your chosen topic which will incorporate at least six scholarly sources (not already assigned for class).

2) a 700-word abbreviated version that will be published in our Medium Collection. The online format will allow you space to design an intertextual publication. You might, for example, include photographs, interviews, or primary sources. This exercise intends for you to continue a black feminist writing practice by putting worthwhile and well-crafted research out into the world.